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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000943

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STATE FOR D (FRITZ), EAP/FO, EUR/RPM, AND EAP/ANP
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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FJ](#) [NZ](#)

SUBJECT: GNZ SAYS FIJI TALKS CONSTRUCTIVE BUT IS TAKING NO
CHANCES

REF: WELLINGTON 938

Classified By: DCM David J. Keegan. Reasons: E.O. 12958, 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Fiji Prime Minister Qarase and Commodore Bainimarama today met for two and a quarter hours at Government House in Wellington. New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) characterized the meeting as a "considered and serious discussion" of Bainimarama's nine demands, with substantial progress made on each issue discussed. The most difficult issue was Fiji's domestic legislation. Qarase's position that due process and constitutionality be followed clashed with Bainimarama's demands. While the meeting was on the "upper end" of GNZ expectations going into the meeting, MFAT remains uncertain about any real outcomes. Deputy Secretary Alan Williams, who participated in the meeting, said that Bainimarama privately indicated he would delay any actions until at least mid-day on December 4 to give Qarase time to show "signs of earnest movement" The challenge remains for Qarase to find an adroit way to satisfy the military without exceeding what his domestic political base will tolerate. PM Qarase departed New Zealand at 3 p.m. on a Royal New Zealand Air Force plane. Bainimarama was scheduled to depart at 6:05 on an Air New Zealand flight.

12. (C) MFAT at this stage is making no assumptions that the meeting will alter the Commodore's plans for a December 4 coup, and will be working to encourage both sides to show continued flexibility as PM Qarase and Commodore Bainimarama return to Suva. In the meantime, MFAT is proceeding to plan for all contingencies, and has authorized departure for any NZ High Commission dependents who wish to leave Fiji. End summary.

13. (C) Today, Fiji's Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase met with commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Frank Bainimarama at Government House. The meeting resulted from the efforts of New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark and Foreign Minister Winston Peters to avert a coup in Fiji (reftel). The talks lasted about two and a quarter hours, after which Bainimarama left to catch his commercial flight back to Suva via Auckland. PM Qarase left for Fiji via a Royal NZ Air Force plane.

14. (U) In a press release he read to the media a few hours after

the meeting, FM Peters said that the talks had been "constructive" with a "positive character." He added that New Zealand hosted the meeting because it recognizes "that resolving the current situation in Fiji is fundamentally important to its future, and to the future of the wider Pacific."

15. (C) MFAT Deputy Secretary Alan Williams was the fourth participant in the talks. He told the DCM after Qarase and Bainimarama had departed that the meeting saw "a really good substantive, detailed, and serious discussion focused on the nine Fijian military demands" -- once the ice was broken. He noted that this had been the first conversation between the two in nine months, a painful reminder of the depth of their antagonism. In the days prior to the meeting, both Foreign Minister Peters and Williams had engaged both leaders in an intensive series of preparatory discussions by telephone. New Zealand's first objective in the meeting was to avoid giving Bainimarama any pretext for walking out in the wake of his threat the day before to the media to make this a five-minute meeting. Once the meeting shifted to a substantive discussion, PM Qarase showed flexibility, while insisting on due process and constitutionality. Bainimarama was hard-nosed, but substantial progress was made on each of the issues discussed.

16. (C) The most difficult issue was Fiji's domestic legislation, specifically two laws increasing the control by indigenous Fijians, in one case over foreshore areas (the "qoliqoli" bill), and in another over native land titles. Both laws confront the complex interplay of private and communal ownership in Fijian law. Bainimarama wants both bills to be struck down. Qarase has agreed to accelerate a constitutional review of this legislation, and New Zealand has promised to assist.

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17. (C) As the meeting concluded and both leaders prepared to depart, MFAT arranged for Bainimarama to avoid the media as he boarded his plane in Wellington and then transferred to a Fiji-bound flight in Auckland. The objective was to give Qarase sufficient space to shape the public perception of the meeting and signal that he is prepared to reach out to the military, the media, and civil society in ways that will give Bainimarama reason to conclude that further steps toward a coup are not warranted.

18. (C) Williams said that he had an extensive conversation with Bainimarama as the two left the meeting and proceeded to the airport for Bainimarama's flight. The Commodore remains heavily skeptical of the Fijian government, but said that he is prepared to test the government by waiting until mid-day on December 4 before deciding whether to proceed with a threatened coup. He said that he is looking for "signs of earnest movement." The question, Williams suggested, is whether both sides, but particularly Qarase, are sufficiently astute, adroit, and determined to bridge the divide between the two sides. Recognizing that many of the issues raised by Bainimarama are valid, Williams says he wonders whether the PM can open a public dialogue that deals with legal issues and the aftermath of the 2000 coup in ways that persuade many in the military to step back. Williams confessed he is "less than overconfident" about whether a coup can be avoided.

19. (C) Other MFAT staff commented separately to Embossos that it was not an easy meeting, but that outcomes were at the "upper end of (our) expectations." MFAT is uncertain about whether the meeting will really achieve anything or how either party will characterize their exchange. GNZ does not intend to speak publicly about the substance of the meeting, leaving that to Qarase and Bainimarama. In the meantime, Foreign Minister Peters has made it clear to both that he is prepared to reengage if there is space to do so. Tomorrow, New Zealand will be talking to Qarase to urge him to move quickly to show that he is using the window before December 4 to render the question of a coup moot. But MFAT officials are planning for all contingencies, and MFAT Consular Affairs informed post that it has authorized evacuation of any NZ High Commission dependents

who wish to leave Fiji.

¶10. (C) Flying to Auckland en route to Suva for a previously-scheduled TDY just as the talks were taking place, a staff member from our Defense Attachi's Office sat next to New Zealand Defence Minister Phil Goff. Goff was upbeat about the talks, but said he would not be surprised if they failed. He said that if a coup did take place, it would most likely be confined to Suva -- adding that its scope would depend on the mentality of rioting mobs. Goff expressed concern that a coup could get out of hand quickly and spread to Nadi and other places.

McCormick